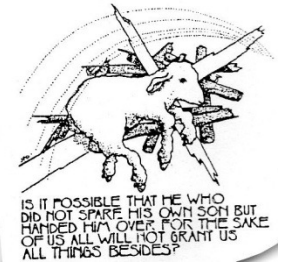


St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Lenten Vesper II. February 24, 2010
Romans 3:21-26



But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Angel Torres was 78 years old. He was walking across the street in Hartford, CT, when a car swerved over the center line and crashed into him. Angel rolled up over the hood – even over the roof of the car – and crash landed back on the street – his head near the center line. People who were in cars and trucks – coming down the street slowed down – and crawled past him. People got out of cars – walked right beside him – and kept on walking. People on the sidewalk – stepped into the street – looked at him from a distance – and just stood there. Angel was so badly injured – he ended up paralyzed from the neck down. Very soon after the accident he couldn't even breathe on his own. He had to be hooked up to a ventilator. The man who crashed into him didn't stop. He went to the next corner and turned right – and went speeding away. I can understand – it all happened so fast. It was an accident. You didn't mean to run over him. You panicked! But then you stop. You think. You talk to people who love you – and they tell you – as painful as it might be – you have to turn yourself in! You have to – you just have to! Or not... After about a year – Angel died. They unplugged the machines that were keeping him alive – and he died. Finally – the girlfriend of a man named Luis said – my boyfriend confessed to me – that he ran over Angel! They arrested Luis and he got a lawyer – who said there is no *proof!* All they have is hearsay! They work out a plea deal – a *deal* – where Luis will plead guilty – if they only put him in prison for a maximum of 12 years out of a possible 30! Really? This is not the same as *I am guilty. I am without excuse. I will willingly accept the punishment I deserve!* When it comes to my sins and failures – my painful and hurtful mistakes – there is no plea agreement. There is only the forgiveness that Jesus won for me by his tortured death on the cross. Today again we rejoice in the simple truth:

We Preach Christ Crucified and Risen!

Today we see: We are Forgiven By Grace Alone Through Faith Alone!

1. *It's not about being good*
2. *It's about being forgiven!*

Today the part of God's Word we are concentrating on – is part of the Apostle Paul's letter to the believers in the city of Rome. There are few books in the whole Bible with as powerful and practical law and gospel as the letter to the Romans. Think about it. **"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** At every funeral at

our Church—built into the funeral liturgy is the passage. **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or sword? As it is written for your sake we face death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No in all these things we are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons—neither the present nor the future nor any powers; neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation *will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* We are safe in Jesus' nail marked hands—and there is absolutely nothing that can take us away from his unconditional forgiving love.**

There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. It is tempting—*tempting* to think that there are lots of differences. There are the really nasty people. You see them on the news. The pediatrician who is charged with doing unspeakable things to the little children who are trusting him to help them when they are sick. How do they know he has harmed these little people? Apparently he made videos of the horrible hurtful things he did! It's tempting to think there are really nasty people—like the drug lords down in Mexico—where they kidnap people and murder them. There are suicide terrorists who try and explode whole airplanes—full of innocent women and children. It's tempting to think there are some very nasty people out there—unlike nice church people like us! But in the verses just before the ones we are concentrating on—Paul says, **“What shall we conclude then? Are *we* any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written:** then Paul breaks into a very sad poem—quoting the Old Testament—not word for word—but packing the verses—jamming the thoughts together—to show our utter—*my* utter wretchedness and hopelessness apart from God's *amazing grace!* **“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips.” “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Romans 3:9-18 We are all sinners—every single one of us. We are no better than the people we sinfully look down on as being *the bad people*. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst!**

There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Justified—is declared not guilty! It's the Judge saying **not guilty!** We watch trial shows in my home. The trial is over—and the Judge says, “The defendant will please rise!” The defendant slowly stands up. Their lawyers—usually one on each side stand up, too, buttoning their very nice suit coats. Then the Judge says, either guilty or not guilty. There is always that brief moment when nobody breathes! Prison forever—without the possibility of parole—or set free. Which will it be? Some people picture Judgment Day—as standing forever in line—behind—what? Literally 104 billion people who have ever lived in the history of the world? And you have to wait—while one by one—people are judged heaven or hell? We are saved. There is no doubt! We are forgiven—freely by his grace—through the redemption—the buying us back that Jesus did with his innocent blood shed to rescue you and me. There will never be that moment where we wonder—am I saved? We are fellow redeemed! We are children of God by grace alone!

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. Jesus is the sacrifice—the whole burnt offering. I think it's hard sometimes—to appreciate the kind of worship that Old Testament believers grew up with. Go to the Tabernacle. Go to the Temple

and there are animals everywhere—bulls. I used to go to Elmer Schmidt’s farm to go deer hunting. Before I would go out to sit in the woods by the old hickory tree—I would spend a little time with Elmer out in the barn. Then I would smell like the barn and the cows—not like *hunter man*—to the deer that are always stopping to sniff the air. Elmer kept a bull—in the bull pen. The bull was huge—with massive shoulders—and a thick neck—and a brass ring in his nose. Bang—the barn door—into the milk house—bang—the door into the barn. The bull would see me and he would snort—and he would paw the straw in his pen—and he would bang his big flat forehead—and lean against the bars—as if to say—hey, buddy, why don’t you come on my side of the bars—for just a moment. Or, wait, let me push through these bars and we could see who’s the toughest. Bang! Bang! Bang! He’s crack the big metal bars. Imagine bringing that bull—or a big wooly sheep—with the really curvy horns—or the little lamb that would push against you because it loved you. Imagine bringing them to church—where the pastor would check them over—to see that they were just perfect. Their eyes bright—and their ears soft—and their legs all just right. And then the lamb or the sheep or the goat or the cow or the bull or the little turtle dove—with the big dark eyes—making that indescribable turtle dove sound—would die in the pastor’s hands. It would bleed and it would die because of my sins! Imagine the smoke—the thick black smoke and the smell—from everything burning—burning up until it was just a pile of ashes. And you would be reminded as we are at the grave—**all men are like grass—and all their glory like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fade—but the Word of the LORD endures forever. And this was the Word that was preached to you.** *Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.* That would be us—except for the sacrifice God the Father made—sacrificing his Son—to make us one again!

He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. God is patient, gentle and merciful! God doesn’t see our sins—and squash us like the irritating little bugs we are. God is patient, gentle and merciful. Are we? Everyone has authority over someone. Parents have authority over their little children. Have you seen little people being dragged by the arm into grocery stores? It’s bitter cold outside—yet they are not wearing hats or mittens or boots. They are crying out—and their parent—their guardian cares not what is wrong. They threaten them—literally scream at them—literally in their face! Forbearance? You hear people say, “Rules are rules! We have zero tolerance—*zero tolerance!*” Little people are in big trouble because they brought a Lego—a *Lego 2*” plastic gun—it’s a gun! Forbearance is patience. It doesn’t mean you don’t address things. It means some thought and care. Did you see the man in the air port the other day? He was angry. He was frustrated. Who doesn’t get frustrated? The measure of a person is—what do you do when you are frustrated—because frustration—in this sin infected world is sure to come—again and again! Bosses can yell at their workers—call them idiots and stupid heads and worse. Because they have the power and the authority—they can get all red in the face—with veins on their forehead and cords and cables in their neck. But think for a moment. Can you imagine Jesus all red faced and veins and cords—in somebody’s face—poking them in the chest with his finger—berating and humiliating and embarrassing someone? Can you imagine that? I don’t think so! Remember God’s forbearance—his patience and gentleness and mercy—the next time—we are tempted to unload on someone—because we have power and authority over them. Remember how God is merciful to us!

God presented him (Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. Jesus’ sacrifice to forgive us changes everything! It is both the reason and the energy to live a life dedicated to glorifying Him! I watched one of those Internet videos—a presentation by a

man who was a quadriplegic from an accident. He has a tube in his throat to make it possible for him to breath. He met some little 5 year old children – who asked him – not about his wheel chair or his arms and legs he can't move – or the plastic tube in this throat – but hey, Mr., what's with the scar on your face? This man gets his finger bent back – broken – when he's being loaded into his van. The doctor who is reading the x-ray is *so oblivious – so utterly oblivious* to the person – the human being he is treating – that without even looking at him actually says, "We're going to have to immobilize your finger!" Seriously? This man who cannot even dress himself – so he ends up being dressed – in almost preschool like color coordinated outfits is not paralyzed by self-pity. He is joyful, cheerful, contented, thankful to his Heavenly Father. He is a powerful example of the Gospel – to anyone who might be tempted to feel sorry for themselves! When God has already given us the priceless gift of his Son – the forgiveness of all our sins – and the sure and certain inheritance of Heaven – we, too, have every reason to live to glorify him – because we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Amen!

To God alone all glory!



Rev. Anthony E. Schuttz